Running and Cardio Won’t Keep You Healthy After 40. Here’s What Does

Opinions expressed by Entrepreneur contributors are their own.

Key Takeaways

- Cardio built the hustle era.
- Strength sustains the long game.

For many entrepreneurs, cardio became the default form of exercise for one simple reason: efficiency.

Running, cycling, spin classes and long walks. Cardio fit neatly into packed schedules and aligns well with the hustle mindset. Burn calories. Clear your head. Get back to work.

In your 30s, that approach often worked. After 40, the equation changes.

Energy becomes less predictable. Recovery takes longer. Stress accumulates more quickly. And despite staying active, many founders notice stubborn weight gain, declining strength, nagging aches or reduced stamina during long workdays.

The issue isn’t a lack of movement.

It’s a mismatch between the demands of midlife leadership and the type of training supporting it.

Why this shift shows up after 40

Several physiological changes accelerate in midlife, regardless of how “fit” someone appears.

Muscle mass naturally declines with age. Metabolic rate slows. Bone density begins to decrease. Stress hormones linger longer after exertion. Recovery from repetitive strain becomes less forgiving. Cardio primarily trains the heart and lungs. While that remains important, it does little to counteract muscle loss, metabolic slowdown, or structural weakness.

Strength training directly addresses these issues.

It preserves muscle, supports joint health, improves insulin sensitivity and stabilizes the body under stress. In other words, it builds a system that holds up under load — exactly what entrepreneurs face daily.

The mistake busy founders keep making

When entrepreneurs notice physical changes after 40, they often double down on what feels familiar.

More cardio.
Longer sessions.
Higher intensity.
More frequency.

Unfortunately, this often increases fatigue without producing better results.

Excessive endurance training, especially when paired with high work stress and poor recovery, can elevate cortisol, impair sleep and accelerate burnout. Instead of creating resilience, it compounds exhaustion.

The result is a familiar pattern: staying active but feeling worn down, sore and less capable than expected.

This isn’t because cardio is bad.

It’s because cardio alone is incomplete.

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The reframe: Strength as a leadership asset

Strength training after 40 is not about aesthetics or athleticism.

It’s about capacity.

Capacity to tolerate stress.
Capacity to recover between long days.
Capacity to maintain energy across years of leadership.

When strength declines, everything feels harder: physically and mentally. When strength is maintained, work feels lighter, even when demands are high.

This is why strength training functions less like a workout and more like infrastructure.

5 reasons strength training matters more after 40

For entrepreneurs, the benefits extend far beyond the gym.

1. **Muscle protects metabolism.** Muscle tissue helps regulate blood sugar and energy levels. Preserving it stabilizes

focus and reduces energy crashes.

2. **Strength improves stress tolerance.** A stronger body handles stress more efficiently, reducing the physical toll of long decision-making days.
3. **Resistance training supports joint and bone health.** This lowers injury risk and keeps founders active, mobile and reliable.
4. **Strength training improves recovery.** Contrary to common belief, properly programmed strength work often improves recovery compared to excessive cardio.
5. **Physical strength reinforces mental confidence.** Feeling physically capable supports decisiveness, posture and leadership presence.

These effects compound quietly, but meaningfully, over time.

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How strength training shapes leadership behavior

What many entrepreneurs overlook is how physical strength influences leadership traits.

When the body feels weak or depleted, leaders often become more reactive, less patient and more mentally fatigued. Small stressors feel heavier. Decision-making narrows. Emotional regulation declines.

Conversely, leaders who maintain strength often report greater calm under pressure, improved focus and a stronger sense of control over their day.

This is not psychological trickery.

It is physiology.

A resilient body supports a resilient nervous system, and leadership flows from that foundation.

Cardio still matters…just not alone

To be clear, this is not an argument against cardiovascular fitness.

Cardio supports heart health, mental clarity and endurance. It remains an important part of a balanced routine.

But after 40, it should support strength, not replace it.

The priority shifts from burning calories to preserving capability. From intensity to durability. From short-term output to long-term leadership.

Strength as a competitive advantage in midlife

Entrepreneurs over 40 do not need to train like athletes. They need to train like leaders with long careers ahead.

Strength training provides something cardio alone cannot: a body that supports sustained decision-making, emotional regulation and resilience under pressure. That foundation allows experience, wisdom and judgment to show up fully, instead of being undermined by fatigue and physical decline.

After 40, strength isn’t about looking strong. It’s about being strong enough to lead well for decades to come. That is not a fitness trend. That is a durable competitive advantage.

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https://www.entrepreneur.com/living/why-running-alone-wont-help-your-health-after-40/502323

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8 Customer Experience Failures Every Leader Should Address Now

Opinions expressed by Entrepreneur contributors are their own.

This article is part of the America’s Favorite Mom & Pop Shops series. Read more stories

Key Takeaways

- Failures like over-automation, inconsistent service, lack of personalization and poor communication erode trust and loyalty.

- Poor problem resolution, ignoring feedback and failing to adapt to customer needs can lead to significant reputational damage.
- Empowerment is an operational necessity. Disempowered employees can have a negative impact on loyalty, retention and customer satisfaction.

Customer experience isn’t a department. It’s a leadership decision.

Every interaction a customer has with your business, from their first inquiry to how you resolve problems, signals what you value. Over time, those signals compound into trust or erosion, loyalty or churn. As companies grow, customer experience failures rarely come from neglect. More often, they come from decisions made in the name of efficiency, scale or cost control.

The challenge for leaders is recognizing these failures early, before they become embedded in culture and systems.

The real cost of poor customer experience

Poor customer experience doesn’t just drive customers away. It weakens businesses from the inside out.

One negative interaction can damage trust, increase churn, lower employee morale and drive up operational costs through repeat issues and escalations. Research shows that many customers are willing to walk away after just a single bad experience, particularly when alternatives are readily available.

Customer experience failures are rarely isolated. They’re signals that leadership priorities and customer expectations are drifting out of alignment.

The 8 failures leaders must confront

1. Over-automation

Automation can improve efficiency, but when it replaces human judgment and empathy, it can backfire. In 2024, Air Canada faced public backlash and legal consequences after its customer service chatbot provided incorrect information, fabricated policies, and misled a customer. The airline was ultimately held responsible for the chatbot's guidance, reinforcing a critical truth: Automation fails when judgment and accountability matter most.

The same principle applies to customer experience. Automated systems may handle volume, but they cannot read context, emotion or nuance. When customers are forced into rigid, automated workflows with no clear path to a human, frustration escalates quickly and trust erodes.

The most effective organizations use technology to support people, not sideline them. They design automation that removes friction while ensuring customers can still reach a human who can listen, interpret and act when it matters most. Recent high-profile AI failures across industries have made one thing clear: Efficiency without empathy is not a scalable strategy.

2. Inconsistent service across channels

Customers don't experience departments. They experience the whole company.

When service quality varies across phone, email and digital channels, it signals a lack of internal alignment and quickly diminishes customer trust. A fast response on one channel followed by confusion or delays on another creates frustration and uncertainty.

High-performing leaders embed consistency into the organization's DNA. They ensure every touchpoint delivers reliability and consistency, and reflects the company's values – even during high-volume or high-pressure situations.

Consistency reassures customers that the business is reliable, no matter how or when they reach out.

3. Lack of personalization

Personalization is no longer optional; it's a strategic differentiator. And it isn't just about algorithms or name tokens in emails.

True personalization comes from making every interaction relevant and intentional. It's when a frontline employee remembers a customer's history, acknowledges their context, listens carefully and responds accordingly.

When personalization is absent and service is inconsistent, customers feel invisible. It's a double failure that drives disengagement faster than almost any operational issue.

When done well, personalization can boost engagement, strengthen loyalty and increase revenue by 5-15%. Leaders who insist on relevance across every touchpoint treat customers as people, not transactions. They empower teams to act on insights, not scripts, and ensure every customer feels seen and valued.

4. Ignoring customer feedback

Feedback isn't a nuisance; it's a roadmap.

Netflix learned this the hard way in 2011, when it underestimated customer backlash to major service and pricing changes and proceeded anyway. The result was rapid subscriber losses and lasting reputational damage. The episode shows how quickly dissatisfaction can compound into lost customers and revenue. The failure wasn't about innovation; it was about not

listening before acting.

Leaders should send a clear signal that customers' opinions influence and shape business decisions. To do so, they should actively solicit feedback, interpret patterns through a strategic lens and act decisively. Every comment, review or complaint is an insight pointing toward smarter, more customer-centered choices.

5. Poor communication

Transparent, timely communication is key to creating a positive customer experience, especially when things go wrong. Customers are far more forgiving of mistakes than of silence.

Delayed or unclear messaging, like Yahoo's mishandled data breach, often causes more harm than the original incident. Customers felt kept in the dark, and trust eroded rapidly.

Leaders who model clarity and honesty set the tone for the entire organization. Communication becomes a tool for reinforcing trust and resilience, not something to avoid when situations are uncomfortable.

6. Poor problem resolution

Speed matters, but resolution matters more.

Unresolved issues often escalate and multiply, particularly in finance or regulated industries. Customers remember how problems are handled long after they forget the original issue.

Strong leaders focus on training for judgment. Teams are taught how to listen, clarify root causes, empathize and propose solutions.

They are also given the right tools: unified customer histories, accessible knowledge bases, clear escalation paths and a culture of psychological safety that allows employees to

make good-faith decisions, even if they aren’t perfect.

A company’s reputation isn’t forged by avoiding mistakes, but by how confidently and thoughtfully it resolves them.

7. Disempowered employees

Frontline employees are the face of your business. When they lack authority, customers feel it immediately.

Teams that are forced to escalate every decision frustrate both staff and customers. Over time, this leads to burnout, higher turnover and inconsistent experiences.

Leaders who empower teams with decision-making power, training and clear guidelines create a culture where employees confidently solve problems. Empowerment is not a courtesy; it is an operational necessity that directly impacts loyalty, retention and customer satisfaction.

8. Failing to adapt to customer needs

Customer expectations evolve quickly, often faster than internal processes.

Ignoring these needs could damage your brand’s reputation and result in revenue losses. Kodak’s decline wasn’t due to a lack of innovation, but a misreading of customer behaviors. The belief that customers would continue to prefer film over digital ultimately cost the company relevance.

Leaders who monitor trends, anticipate shifts and pivot quickly keep their business relevant and competitive. Adaptability isn’t reactive. It’s a leadership discipline that must be embedded in both strategy and culture.

Turning failures into leadership

wins

Customer experience failures are inevitable. What separates resilient organizations from fragile ones is how leaders respond.

Strong companies acknowledge issues quickly, communicate clearly, empower employees to act and systematically learn from mistakes. Empathy plays a strategic role that shapes decisions and actions at every level.

Leaders who embed empathy, clarity and adaptability into their culture recover faster, retain customers longer and build stronger internal cohesion.

Customer experience starts at the top

Failures don’t happen in isolation. They reflect leadership priorities, incentives and culture. Long-term success doesn’t require perfection; it requires attention, responsiveness and a commitment to human-centered business.

In an increasingly automated world, the companies that stand out will be the ones that remain unmistakably human.

Sign up for the Entrepreneur Daily newsletter to get the news and resources you need to know today to help you run your business better. Get it in your inbox.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/leadership/8-customer-experience-failures-leaders-need-to-address-now/502084

This Founder Is Taking a Bite Out of the $50 Billion GLP-1 Market By Going Natural

Opinions expressed by Entrepreneur contributors are their own.

Key Takeaways

- Evolv co-founder Becca McCarthy saw a massive GLP-1 trend — and built a natural alternative to match it.
- She believes appetite control doesn't need a prescription, a needle, or a stigma.

Becca McCarthy says she's always been good at recognizing when something is about to break into the mainstream. She has spent her career inside startups, helping turn early interest into real markets and building products before most people realize there's demand for them.

That's why, a few years ago, when she started hearing people in her network talking about GLP-1 drugs, she paid attention. GLP-1 drugs such as Ozempic and Zepbound are among the fastest-growing prescription medicines in the U.S., with total GLP-1 sales worldwide estimated at around $50 billion.

But McCarthy was hearing about them long before they became cultural shorthand. Her otherwise healthy friends and family were injecting these drugs for weight loss and keeping it mostly to themselves. Using a medication designed for diabetes to manage appetite carried a stigma. It was considered cheating and ran counter to the wellness world's insistence on clean eating, discipline, and willpower.

That’s when she saw an opportunity gap. “I thought, what if you could come up with a solve for this massive demand that’s building for efficacy from GLP-1 receptor activation without upsetting the diet and exercise police, then you have a massive solution.”

The answer eventually became Evolv, a natural, oral supplement designed to mimic the effects of GLP-1 without needles, prescriptions, synthetic hormones, or the judgment that surrounds pharmaceuticals.

Related: This Is How GLP-1 Drugs Are Forcing Restaurant Chains to Change Their Menus

A natural solution

To get there, McCarthy teamed up in 2023 with Dr. Corey Henderson, a molecular biologist who had designed a novel peptide that could interact with GLP1 and GIP receptors in the same way that the drugs do, but in a totally natural way without any synthetics. The company says the product supports appetite regulation and metabolic function by activating the same pathways that make pharmaceutical GLP-1s so compelling—but through a natural mechanism that begins in the gut.

They experimented with different delivery methods—first a shake, then a dietary supplement—and eventually landed on a pill. Once they received encouraging feedback from early data, McCarthy committed fully. “I realized this is going to change the world. So I just went all in,” she says.

Related: How This Founder Turned ‘Dry January’ Into a Year-Round Movement — And Built America’s #1 Non-Alcoholic Beer Brand

Overcoming hurdles

McCarthy has had to push through her share of hurdles. One of the most persistent is being taken seriously as a female founder. “There is an inherent bias that we are up against, where it’s really easy for me to be perceived as a highly competent and investable founder or entrepreneur or boss or leader, but it’s very hard for me to be perceived as likable in that role,” she says.

McCarthy recalls times she’s gone to pitch meetings and was mistaken for an admin. Another time, she was turned down only to watch men get funding with a far inferior idea. It’s hard,” she says. “It’s not handed to you in the same way when you’re a female.”

Another challenge has been the silence that comes with success. Customers see results, but they don’t necessarily want to explain how they got them. “People want everybody to think it’s because they went to so many Pilates classes,” she says. It’s hard to build word of mouth when the very thing people like most about a product is that no one knows they’re using it.

Despite the challenge of getting customers to talk openly about the product, McCarthy isn’t dwelling on the marketing dilemma. She’s focused on helping people manage their appetite without requiring a doctor, a prescription, or a needle. It’s the results that will ultimately make the biggest difference. “People just want to look better naked. So when we deliver on that, that’s what works.”

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https://www.entrepreneur.com/business-news/this-founder-built-natural-glp-1-alternative-before-the-boom/502567

How Will the Economy Perform in 2026? These 7 People Will Tell You.

Opinions expressed by Entrepreneur contributors are their own.

Key Takeaways

- What executives are seeing inside their businesses right now.
- Why on-the-ground data can tell a different story than official reports.

I generally ignore government data because it is subject to significant revisions and, in many cases, relies on older methodologies. I also pay little attention to the countless surveys sent to me because their methodology and sample sizes are often dubious, and survey sponsors frequently have an agenda (“our survey shows that small businesses lack customer service software,” says a firm that sells customer service software).

So, where do you go to really find out how the economy is faring?

America is a capitalist economy, and it runs on three critical components: capital, consumers, and jobs. Follow those, and you’ll know.

For capital, follow the banks

The nation’s largest bank is JPMorgan Chase. Jaime Morgan is the CEO. On January 13th, his bank reported that the U.S. economy has remained resilient. “While labor markets have softened, conditions do not appear to be worsening,” Dimon’s team wrote. “Meanwhile, consumers continue to spend, and businesses generally remain healthy. These conditions could persist for some time, particularly with ongoing fiscal stimulus, the benefits of deregulation and the Fed’s recent monetary policy.”

The nation’s third-largest bank is Wells Fargo. Its CEO is Charles Scharf. On January 14th, he said, “In our consumer businesses, credit cards continue to see strong increases in spend and new accounts grew over 20% from a year ago.” He also said that auto lending “returned to growth with balances up 19% from the prior year” and that “In our commercial businesses, loans grew 12%.” He is not reporting significant exposures, nor has he seen a “meaningful shift” in customer data, including checking account flows, direct deposit amounts, overdraft activity and payments.

“It has been very consistent activity,” he said.

Watch consumers

How about consumers? To see how they’re doing, I listen to Doug McMillon, Andy Jassy and Ted Decker. They are the CEOs of Walmart, Amazon, and Home Depot, respectively. They last reported earnings in mid-November (Amazon’s was near the end of October), before the holidays, and their next public reports will come in early to mid-February.

In November, McMillon said, “We expect full-year net sales to climb between 4.8% and 5.1%, up from its previous expectations of 3.75% to 4.75%. Comparable sales for Walmart U.S. rose 4.5% in the third quarter compared with the year-ago period. We’re well-positioned for a strong finish to the year and beyond that.”

Jassy said, “Net sales increased 13% to $180.2 billion in the third quarter,” and that “we continue to see strong momentum and growth across Amazon as AI drives meaningful improvements in every corner of our business.”

That sounds pretty good. But given the woes in construction and housing, what about Home Depot? What Decker said wasn’t surprising — but it wasn’t terrible either.

Decker reported that his company’s results “missed our expectations primarily,” but blamed the shortfall on the “lack of storms” rather than the economy. He also said that “while underlying demand in the business remained relatively stable sequentially, an expected increase in demand in the third quarter did not materialize,” adding that he believes “consumer uncertainty and continued pressure in housing are disproportionately impacting home improvement demand.”

For jobs, listen to the payroll companies

Finally, jobs. I'm not a big fan of the numbers coming out of the Department of Labor — and neither, apparently, is the chair of the Federal Reserve. So where do I go to assess the strength of the job market? I look to the CEOs of ADP and Paychex, the two largest payroll providers in the country, whose data reflects millions of workers paid through their platforms.

"Private sector employment increased by 41,000 jobs in December, and pay was up 4.4% year-over-year," said ADP, whose CEO is Maria Black. According to the company's monthly Pay Insights report, "small establishments recovered from November job losses with positive end-of-year hiring, even as large employers pulled back. Year-over-year pay for job-stayers rose 4.4% in December. For job-changers, the pace of pay growth accelerated to 6.6% from 6.3%."

Those are healthy pay increases, especially with inflation currently running below 3%.

John Gibson is the CEO of Paychex, which publishes a monthly report called the Small Business Employment Watch. Paychex most recently said that "2025 marked a year of consistency for U.S. small business job and wage growth trends. Our data reveals a continued moderation in wage inflation and little change in the rate of job growth among America's small businesses." Throughout the year, Gibson has repeatedly said that small business hiring was consistent.

All of this is real data from actual companies. They report to shareholders and to the public. They are liable for misleading statements. To me, these seven people provide more credible insight into their businesses — each of which underpins the economy — than most other sources I know.

And so far, so good.

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Looking for a PR Agency That Actually Delivers Results?

Here’s How to Find One.

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Key Takeaways

- The ideal agency provides three things: a standardized workflow, measurable results and the strategic backbone to tell you when your narrative is failing.
- Make agencies prove their process, demand recent wins that match your requirements, get specific about who will run your account, be honest about your budget, and be careful with independent publicists.
- Choose an agency that will challenge you. If the agency only agrees with you, they are not protecting your best interests.

If you are hiring PR because you want “more visibility,” stop. Visibility is not the goal. The goal is trust at scale. The right PR partner earns you credibility you cannot buy with ads, and the wrong one turns your story into noise. Your job is to choose an agency that builds equity, not one that chases attention.

If you want PR that actually moves the business, you need a selection process that rewards execution, and here’s how you can do just that.

Reset your baseline before you start

Most bad PR experiences are not proof that PR does not work. They happen because expectations were vague, the agency was

running too many accounts, the retainer did not cover actual labor, or the agency could not show what it was doing week to week.

Stop looking for “creative partners,” and start looking for an operating system. The ideal agency provides three things: a standardized workflow, measurable results and the strategic backbone to tell you when your narrative is failing.

Cut the list fast

Do not collect a pile of proposals. That is how you end up choosing based on writing style and big promises. Narrow to two or three agencies before you ask for a full proposal. The proposal should confirm how you will work together, not try to hypnotize you with a dream outcome.

If an agency cannot earn a top-three spot after one or two calls and a basic review of their recent work, they are not your agency.

Make them prove their process

I do not care how smart someone sounds on a sales call. I care what they can show. PR is a production system, and weak operations show up as missed follow-ups and vague updates.

Ask to see the backend. Ask how they track pitches and responses, and how they share campaign status. Ask what happens from approval to outreach.

If they cannot walk you through their systems clearly, you are taking a risk you do not need. If you cannot understand where the campaign stands within two clicks, the operation is not tight. If they cannot show you their workflow because it is “proprietary,” that usually means it is messy.

Follow the time, not the talk

Output requires time, and time is the resource you are truly buying. It either goes toward pitching and relationship building, or it disappears into admin.

Ask how your retainer translates into hours, then ask how those hours are used across roles. You should be able to see who is writing and pitching, and how approvals run, plus how many clients your lead supports. If one person is stretched across too many accounts, you will feel it in delayed drafts and rushed outreach.

Demand recent wins that match your requirements

Do not get distracted by one flashy, like a Forbes or Wall Street. What matters is whether the agency produces qualified coverage month after month on a budget like yours.

Ask for the last 30, 60 and 90 days of coverage for clients on a similar retainer. If they refuse to share it or only show curated highlights, be cautious. Also, ask to see a full year of coverage for at least one client. PR is a long game. You want to know what the agency produces over time when the novelty wears off.

Get specific about who will run your account

Ask how many press hits an account executive is expected to secure per month per client and what support structure makes that possible. Then ask to see what that team member has secured in the last 120 days.

Doing that doesn’t mean you’re interrogating someone’s worth.

You just want to confirm that the agency is staffed realistically and that the person running your work is productive right now, not just talented in theory.

Be honest about your budget, because PR is not a trial

Premium results require premium infrastructure, and meaningful PR requires enough budget for consistent execution. Budget for $12,000 to $15,000 monthly to secure a high-performing team. In this market, $10,000 is the absolute operational floor. Anything less, and you're paying for corners to be cut.

PR is like an engine. If you remove parts to save money, you do not get the same car. So, when someone tells me PR did not work for them, my first question is what they paid and what they actually bought with that budget. The investment can be worth it because equity compounds, and strong coverage becomes a credential you can leverage for years.

Be careful with independent publicists

There are talented independents, but they are rare and not cheap. The bigger issue is capacity. If you lack the budget for a "unicorn" hire or a top-tier agency, focus on internalizing your content strategy.

Use founder-led storytelling to establish a baseline of authority, so when you finally engage the press, you're operating from a position of strength, not desperation.

One final standard that matters

more than people admit

Choose an agency that will challenge you. If your messaging is unclear or your story rambles, a good team tells you directly. PR is positioning plus performance under pressure. If the agency only agrees with you, they are not protecting your best interests.

Remember that PR is not magic. It is disciplined output guided by an operating system. Choose based on proof and cadence that align with your team, and you will build a reputation that makes everything else easier.

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https://www.entrepreneur.com/growing-a-business/how-to-find-a-pr-agency-that-actually-delivers-results/502059

How to Remove the Invisible Barriers That Stand Between You and a Clean, Successful Exit

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Key Takeaways

- Unreliable and inconsistent data can result in a much lower purchase multiple. It creates mistrust and gives buyers a reason to decrease their offer.
- Another unseen barrier is having a founder-dependent finance function. If it’s dependent upon the founder, buyers will perceive a high degree of execution risk.
- Being exit-ready means management reports are generated within days (not weeks), your KPIs have been consistent over the past three years and your working capital is clean.

At eight months before selling a portfolio company, the buyer's diligence group asked us to provide monthly revenue data for each customer segment. A straightforward request – except that this information existed in three different systems – Salesforce, QuickBooks and Excel spreadsheets.

It took us six weeks to gather the information, and after we provided it to the buyer, the differences in the various systems had generated enough mistrust of the company's financial reporting that the buyer lowered its offer by $8 million, which equated to about one full EBITDA multiple of what the business was worth. The business and the strategic plan were good. But poor data resulted in a lower purchase multiple.

According to EY's Private Equity Exit Readiness Study, 72% of businesses do not have access to reliable and consistent data and KPIs needed to support exit readiness. In fact, this is not a matter of data quality. It is a matter of valuations being affected by unreliable and inconsistent data.

Buyers cannot risk losing their confidence in a seller's numbers. If they cannot believe the numbers, they will decrease the purchase price. If they need to spend extra weeks reconciling the seller's financial reporting, the deal momentum will cease. If a seller's financial reporting function is dependent upon the founder, buyers will perceive a high degree of execution risk.

The value of having clean data

In terms of how much clean data adds to your overall value, according to GF Data, businesses that hired a third party to conduct a sell-side quality of earnings (QoE) report prior to exiting received an average of 7.4x TEV/EBITDA, compared to those that did not receive an average of 7.0x TEV/EBITDA.

Finance function independence test

The second unseen barrier is having a founder-dependent finance function. I have seen many deals stall when the only person who really knew the numbers was the CEO, and he was exhausted from six months of diligence questions.

A buyer wants to be able to see that there is a finance function that will operate independently and not by an outsourced bookkeeper or the CEO's family member. It means there is someone with institutional credibility who can sit down with the buyer's due diligence team and defend the financial statements.

Also, if your monthly closing takes three people to manually enter numbers into a spreadsheet, you have a problem. The modern ERP system should be able to pull the data automatically, reconcile it and generate the financials without needing heroic efforts.

One of the best investments we made was hiring a VP of Finance 18 months before our exit. We did not hire a CFO since we were not ready to spend that money yet, but we wanted to get to a point where the closing process would be more formalized, have a good ERP system and be able to provide consistent KPI dashboards. The cost of the VP of Finance position was approximately $180k in salary. The VP of Finance added at least $3 million to our exit price as a result of the buyers being confident in the numbers we provided.

What "exit-ready" means

Companies that are exit-ready have common traits:

Management reports are generated within days, not weeks. When a buyer requests a report of monthly revenue by product line, you can provide it that day and not after taking weeks to compile the information.

Your company’s KPIs have been consistent over the past three years. Buyers want to see trends. If you have changed the way you define customer metrics two times in the last two years, you are indicating that you do not use data to run your business.

Your working capital is clean. Having clean working capital, correct accounts payable and accounts receivable, and correct inventory levels removes friction from the deal.

The 18-month window

The biggest mistake that sellers make is waiting to fix these things until they decide to go to market, by which time it is too late. You cannot establish a finance function that operates independently in three months. You cannot create three years of clean KPI history overnight.

The appropriate amount of time to prepare for an exit is approximately 18 months prior to the anticipated date of sale.

This will allow for sufficient time to implement systems to collect, track and report company data; hire/develop the required internal talent to provide financial services independent of management oversight; have a third party sell-side QoE analyze your company’s financial performance to identify areas of concern before a potential buyer does; and establish KPIs to effectively communicate the operational performance of your organization.

What it’s worth

Let’s look at some numbers. For example, take a $15 million EBITDA business. The market multiple for this type of business is typically 7.0 times. Clean data and an independent finance department may be able to increase the multiple to 7.4 times. This premium was noted as such in a study conducted by GF

Data. Therefore, the additional enterprise value for this premium would be $6 million ($15 million x 7.4 / 7.0).

The total cost to create the premium would be: $200k for a VP of Finance for eighteen months, $75k for a sell-side QoE and $50k for any system improvements, for a total of $325k (approximately).

Therefore, the return on investment for creating the premium would be: 1614% ($6 million – $350k = $5.65 million / $350k).

Valuation friction is like a ghost – it is difficult to see until it has cost you money. At the point a buyer is questioning the accuracy of your data or the ability of your finance staff to provide answers to basic questions without needing to escalate to the CEO, you have already lost the upper hand in negotiations.

Companies that receive premium multiples are not necessarily those with the best story – but rather those whose stories are supported by accurate, reliable and independent data that a buyer can trust.

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Key Takeaways

- Unreliable and inconsistent data can result in a much lower purchase multiple. It creates mistrust and gives buyers a reason to decrease their offer.
- Another unseen barrier is having a founder-dependent finance function. If it’s dependent upon the founder, buyers will perceive a high degree of execution risk.
- Being exit-ready means management reports are generated within days (not weeks), your KPIs have been consistent over the past three years and your working capital is

clean.

At eight months before selling a portfolio company, the buyer’s diligence group asked us to provide monthly revenue data for each customer segment. A straightforward request — except that this information existed in three different systems — Salesforce, QuickBooks and Excel spreadsheets.

It took us six weeks to gather the information, and after we provided it to the buyer, the differences in the various systems had generated enough mistrust of the company’s financial reporting that the buyer lowered its offer by $8 million, which equated to about one full EBITDA multiple of what the business was worth. The business and the strategic plan were good. But poor data resulted in a lower purchase multiple.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/money-finance/how-to-remove-the-hidden-barriers-that-jeopardize-your-exit/501896

AI Can Delete Your Data — and Ignoring This Warning Could Damage Your Business Beyond Repair

Opinions expressed by Entrepreneur contributors are their own.

Key Takeaways

- AI systems have made work easier, but they are not yet fully developed and competent.
- If AI systems fail, they can cause catastrophic damage and delete your company’s data, destroying hard work in seconds.
- CEOs must communicate the risks to all staff, ensure AI has less privilege than humans, develop instant recovery plans and constantly invest in data protection and restoration measures.

Never feel that you are totally safe. In July 2025, one company learned the hard way after an AI coding assistant it dearly trusted from Replit ended up breaching a “code freeze” and implemented a command that ended up deleting its entire product database.

This was a huge blow to the staff. It effectively meant that months of extremely hard work, comprising 1,200 executive records and 1,196 company records, ended up going away. The pain was so much that the system even admitted to destroying hard work in a matter of seconds.

This proves that AI systems are not yet as reliable as humans, even though they have made work easier. The system itself made a catastrophic decision. The Replit incident should be a stern message to CEOs that the use of AI systems currently also presents a risk. The tools are not yet fully developed and competent. If they fail, they can cause catastrophic damage and erase your data.

The incident showed how AI can harm productivity

Replit showed how a minor issue can cause a whole system to collapse. The AI, which was meant to enhance and do coding,

was given control of critical systems. After encountering a minor challenge, in the form of data queries, it did not have access to the human touch that we can consult when we are confused. It panicked and ran a catastrophic, destructive command.

The biggest flaw with AI is that it can get confused and lacks the basic judgment found in humans. The AI in the case of Replit had the potential to delete the database, but it struggled with basic human things such as risk assessment and being able to consult someone when it is confused – key parts of being human.

One blog post published on Rewind.com noted, “AI doesn’t understand business context or intent. It can execute commands literally, without questioning whether the action could cause irreparable harm.”

The incident exposed a major issue

What happened to Replit was not an isolated issue. It is one of many AI-related disasters that have occurred and presents a growing number of AI-related problems that can be catastrophic, especially if not contained early.

Unlike regular software bugs, which can cause errors, AI often causes destructive actions. For example, in another incident, a user asked an AI assistant to perform a command. It then went on to delete 26,477 documents and stated that it had “completed the request.”

Another problem found is that AI can generate fabricated or false data. In the aftermath of the deletion, it was also found that the AI had generated over 4,000 fake user records. The test results that it provided were also found to not be true. This means that AI is capable of producing misleading data, which can be destructive to the growth of humanity. This is also a mechanism it uses to cover for its shortcomings.

It is often said that AI can hallucinate information. As the Replit case shows, it does not just do this. It can spread misinformation easily and be harmful. This is costly in the long-run to not only a business but to the intellectual development of humanity.

What is the role of the CEO?

For a CEO, data loss can threaten the survival of their business. It is estimated that data loss costs the world economy about $4.44 million globally. Companies cannot just have theoretical plans for data loss. The risks must be communicated to all staff, from those involved in DevOps and cybersecurity to leadership.

Replit paid the price because it granted too much privilege to AI. CEOs must always try to make sure that AI has less privilege than humans. This will prevent it from executing destructive commands, or if it does, the problem can be rectified quickly.

One must make instant recovery plans. These days, the traditional ways of recovering data are becoming increasingly obsolete. Leaders must constantly aim to invest in ways of protecting and restoring data.

A CEO must also analyze and evaluate all AI tools used by different sectors of the business. Prepare plans of action on how to restore and retrieve data if these systems fail. Do not be totally dependent on them.

AI is bringing great benefits to nearly everyone, and especially to the world of technology. However, its tendency to create misleading information and destruction is also something that cannot be ignored. The path forward for humans to live in harmony with AI is for them to be responsible and vigilant in how they use it.

AI is here to help you, but do not become over-reliant on it. It needs regular monitoring by humans if you want to prevent it from making catastrophic errors, and in order to get the most from it. If used properly and ethically, it will bring you benefits.

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https://www.entrepreneur.com/science-technology/ai-can-delete-your-data-heres-your-prevention-plan/501987

Private Schools in NYC Now Cost More Than Elite Colleges. Here's the Shocking Number.

Elite private schools in New York City now charge more for tuition than Harvard does, according to Bloomberg.

At least seven NYC private schools will charge over $70,000 for tuition this fall, with Avenues The World School in Chelsea leading the pack at $75,300. That number exceeds Harvard's $56,550 tuition and surpasses many elite colleges. Fees rose a median of 4.7% across 15 schools surveyed, outpacing inflation and up from a median of $39,900 in 2014.

The schools cite rising costs, including salaries for teachers trying to make a living in expensive New York. About 20% to 22% of students at top schools receive financial aid, with some families getting token amounts "so their family can breathe a little bit more or take a vacation," according to education consultants who are getting a lot more questions these days about financial aid.

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https://www.entrepreneur.com/business-news/nyc-private-school-tuition-tops-70000-this-year/502601

I Help Entrepreneurs With Estate Planning. Here's What Actually Matters When

Choosing a Successor

Opinions expressed by Entrepreneur contributors are their own.

Key Takeaways

- A business isn’t truly scalable until it can operate without its founder present.
- Succession planning is about systems and access, not trust, loyalty or family ties.

I can usually tell when a founder has never thought about succession. It’s when they can explain their pricing model, their hiring plan, and their next product sprint. But they take time to answer this question: If you could not show up tomorrow, who could step in and keep your company running?

In recent years, the trend that has surprised me most is not who founders pick as successors, but rather that so many have no plan at all. This is especially common among young founders or those with no partners. That tells me something about how modern entrepreneurs think about legacy and control. They still picture control as a person, not a structure.

As long as they are alive and reachable, they assume the business is safe.

That assumption is a huge risk.

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Founders aren’t contingency planning, and that’s the real risk

If you run a lean company, it is easy to tell yourself you will “get to it later.” However, data shows that *later* is where many owners get stuck.

While most business owners with employees plan to sell or transfer their companies as they approach retirement, the landscape for the roughly 30 million non-employer businesses is quite different. Only about 35% of these solo owners intend to pass on their ownership through a sale or gift. Data suggests that these independent owners also face significantly more uncertainty about the future, with this lack of clarity being even more pronounced among younger entrepreneurs.

The true test of a scalable business isn’t its monthly recurring revenue — it’s the ability it has to function without its founder. Far too many ‘successful’ companies are still operating on a solo-operator back end, where every critical financial and legal lever is pulled by a single person.

To transition into a mature organization, you must decouple the business’s survival from your personal device. When 2FA codes and bank access sit in a single inbox, you’re creating an operational barricade. Real leadership means building a structure where the machinery keeps humming, even when the person who built it is unavailable.

Moreover, succession planning is not about whether you’re ready or not. I often bring it up because the law and the market do not care *when* and *why* you are absent. If something happens and there is no clearly designated successor, your company can end up in limbo while ownership, authority and access are sorted out. The longer that limbo lasts, the more likely you are to lose employees, customers and leverage.

Naming the right successor is not (just) about trust

The most common blind spot founders carry for years is that they evaluate successors emotionally. They pick based on closeness, loyalty, or family ties, then they hope capability will follow.

This is understandable. Your business is personal. Your identity is tied to it. You want to believe the person who loves you will protect what you built.

But successor selection has to be matter of fact. The real question is who is *best suited* to carry the business forward when you are gone or unavailable. That takes time because readiness is not a vibe. It shows up in patterns. Who proves reliable when stakes rise? Who makes sound calls when information is incomplete? Who can lead a team through uncertainty without sending everyone into panic? Who has the entrepreneurial judgment and raw problem-solving capacity to handle a responsibility that will not come with training wheels?

If this sounds like a CEO search, that is the point. Your successor should be evaluated like a CEO candidate, not like next of kin.

You can pressure-test this before succession is even on the table. Give someone real authority over a meaningful decision. Watch how they communicate upward and downward. Watch whether they build trust with customers, vendors and employees. Then, make your decision.

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How to define your legacy in practical terms

Legacy is what survives after you stop being the person who answers every question, approves every exception and holds every critical relationship together.

Most founders misunderstand this because they picture legacy as the brand story or the mission statement. Legacy lives in authority, access and instructions. If your successor has to interpret what you would have wanted, you are only leaving them ambiguity, and ambiguity leads to delays, conflict and value loss.

Write everything down, early. Not in broad language, not as a promise, and not as “they’ll know what I meant.” Your goal is: if you are not available, the person you name should be able to step in and keep the business moving without guessing and without waiting for permission that no longer exists.

That clarity matters because informal systems are a major risk, especially for early-stage companies. To protect stakeholders, establish unmistakable decision-making rules in writing. Define clear boundaries for individual authority versus group input. Most importantly, codify ‘contingency architecture’ — have a written plan for partner exits, disagreements and urgent transitions like mergers or fundraising. Often, the younger the company, the more damaging uncertainty becomes, as there is less structure to absorb it.

Do not overlook digital ownership either, because this is where tech-forward founders get blindsided. Your successor can have the title and still be locked out if the domain, cloud platforms, payment tools, ad accounts and code access are tied only to you. Legacy is not only about who takes over. Legacy is whether they can access what keeps the business alive.

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https://www.entrepreneur.com/leadership/why-the-real-test-of-leadership-is-what-happens-without-you/502262

New Alarming Study Reveals AI Is Making Us Work More, Not Less

AI was supposed to lessen your workload, but it’s actually making you work more. That’s the finding of an eight-month

study from UC Berkeley.

Researchers tracked 200 employees at a U.S. tech company and discovered workers using generative AI didn’t work less—they worked faster and took on broader projects, often extending work into more hours voluntarily. The main culprits were task expansion, with employees doing work that previously belonged to others, and blurred boundaries as workers prompted AI during lunch or breaks.

The result has disastrous implications. Cognitive fatigue and burnout offset any productivity gains. Researchers warn companies need an “AI practice”—intentional norms including pauses and human connection—to prevent short-term wins from becoming unsustainable overwork and weakened decision-making.

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